

SENATE RECORD VOTE ANALYSIS

104th Congress
1st Session

Vote No. 269

June 20, 1995, 12:16 p.m.
Page S-8653 Temp. Record

NATIONAL HIGHWAY SYSTEM/Speed Limit for Commercial Vehicles

SUBJECT: National Highway System Designation Act of 1995 . . . S. 440. Reid amendment No. 1427.

ACTION: AMENDMENT AGREED TO, 51-49

SYNOPSIS: As reported, S. 440, the National Highway System Designation Act of 1995, will designate the National Highway System in accordance with the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA). Failure to enact the bill by September 30, 1995, will result in all States losing their National Highway System and Interstate Maintenance funding.

The Reid amendment would retain the current national maximum speed limit of 55 miles per hour for vehicles: with a gross weight rating of more than 10,000 pounds; that are designed to transport more than 15 passengers; or that are required to carry warning labels under the Hazardous Materials Transportation Act. (The bill will eliminate the limit for both cars and trucks.)

Those favoring the amendment contended:

The Reid amendment would retain the 55 mph speed limit for commercial trucks. This amendment is about safety. Trucks are far more dangerous than cars. Their large size and long braking distances make them deadly on the roadways. Compounding the problem, trucking deregulation has increased unsafe driving practices by truckers, who drive excessive hours at excessive rates of speed. Virtually everyone has had the unpleasant experience of seeing a truck hurtle by them as they move along at the speed limit, or of being tailgated by trucks that need approximately 40 percent more room to stop than do cars. As of 1990, the average weight of these vehicles reached 80,000 pounds. The general driving public is rightfully scared of enormous speeding trucks. Large commercial trucks account for only 3 percent of registered vehicles and 7 percent of miles traveled, yet they are involved in over 11 percent of all fatal crashes. In crashes between trucks and cars, 98 percent of the time the fatalities are found in the cars. Each year, nearly 5,000 people are killed by trucks.

Studies have shown that the percentage of trucks traveling over 70 mph is between 2 to 6 times greater on a roadway with a 65 mph speed limit as it is on a roadway with a 55 mph limit. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Commission, the chance

(See other side)

YEAS (51)			NAYS (49)			NOT VOTING (0)	
Republicans (8 or 15%)	Democrats (43 or 93%)		Republicans (46 or 85%)	Democrats (3 or 7%)		Republicans (0)	Democrats (0)
Bond	Akaka	Inouye	Abraham	Inhofe	Baucus		
Chafee	Biden	Johnston	Ashcroft	Kempthorne	Graham		
DeWine	Bingaman	Kennedy	Bennett	Kyl	Robb		
Gorton	Boxer	Kerrey	Brown	Lott			
Hatfield	Bradley	Kerry	Burns	Mack			
Jeffords	Breaux	Kohl	Campbell	McCain			
Kassebaum	Bryan	Lautenberg	Coats	McConnell			
Lugar	Bumpers	Leahy	Cochran	Murkowski			
	Byrd	Levin	Cohen	Nickles			
	Conrad	Lieberman	Coverdell	Packwood			
	Daschle	Mikulski	Craig	Pressler			
	Dodd	Moseley-Braun	D'Amato	Roth			
	Dorgan	Moynihan	Dole	Santorum			
	Exon	Murray	Domenici	Shelby			
	Feingold	Nunn	Faircloth	Simpson			
	Feinstein	Pell	Frist	Smith			
	Ford	Pryor	Gramm	Snowe			
	Glenn	Reid	Grams	Specter			
	Harkin	Rockefeller	Grassley	Stevens			
	Heflin	Sarbanes	Gregg	Thomas			
	Hollings	Simon	Hatch	Thompson			
		Wellstone	Helms	Thurmond			
			Hutchison	Warner			

EXPLANATION OF ABSENCE:

- 1—Official Business
- 2—Necessarily Absent
- 3—Illness
- 4—Other

SYMBOLS:

- AY—Announced Yea
- AN—Announced Nay
- PY—Paired Yea
- PN—Paired Nay

of death or serious injury doubles for every 10 mph that a vehicle travels over 50 mph. Putting these two facts together, it is obvious that we can reduce the chance of death or serious injury from an accident with a truck by continuing to enforce the 55 mph speed limit for them.

Unlike the speed limit for cars, a speed limit for commercial vehicles is clearly not just a States' right issue. Commercial trucks move primarily in interstate commerce, which the Federal Government has a duty to regulate. They typically have license plates from at least a few States, and they often have them from a dozen States or more. Though they comprise only 3 percent of the registered vehicles in the country, they comprise 12 percent of the interstate traffic. All these facts serve to illustrate that commercial trucking is primarily an interstate, not an intrastate, activity. Having national standards is therefore in order.

Those standards should be to preserve safety. No matter what State one is in, the driving behavior of truckers should be the same. Car drivers should not be put at risk by enormous, speeding trucks. We therefore strongly support the Reid amendment.

Those opposing the amendment contended:

Argument 1:

The safest speed for any vehicle is 0 mph. Once it is allowed to move, the risks begin. How great those risks are depends on such factors as speed, road conditions, congestion, visibility, and terrain. The question is not whether risks will be taken--the American people are not about to give up driving. The question, instead, is who is better able to determine the speed at which vehicles, including trucks, should be allowed to go. We believe that the States are best able to make this determination.

State legislators are no less concerned with protecting their citizens' lives than are Members of Congress. More importantly, they are much more aware of their individual States' needs than are Members. They are intimately familiar with road conditions, traffic volumes, and other factors that need to be taken into consideration in setting speed limits. If State legislators in a flat, desert State decide that a 70-mph speed limit for trucks and cars makes sense, we should trust their judgment. We should not arrogantly assume that we here in Washington know the road conditions in their State better than they do. Just because trucks move from State to State does not mean that driving conditions are the same in each State. A uniform, national speed limit for trucks will therefore create uniform speeds, but certainly not uniform safety.

The Reid amendment is illogical. It would set an arbitrary speed limit for trucks instead of letting States set rational limits based on the conditions in each State. We therefore urge the rejection of the Reid amendment.

Argument 2:

We favor having a national speed limit of 55 mph, and we favor the current right to raise that limit to 65 in certain rural areas, at a State's discretion. However, we know from experience in our States having a lower speed limit for trucks than for cars actually is more dangerous than allowing all traffic to move at a uniform speed. Having trucks move at a different rate of speed than surrounding traffic, even by having them go slower, causes more accidents than it prevents. The Reid amendment should therefore be rejected.